

A CHRISTMAS CURE.

BY EMILIE POULSSON.

SANTA CLAUS sat by the fire in his own home, looking anxious and troubled. His droll little mouth was not drawn up like a bow; his eyes had not twinkled for ten minutes; and his dimples, even, would n't have looked merry if they could have helped it.

Santa Claus sat there thinking—thinking. It was just before Christmas. What was the matter with the good jolly old Saint? Had his sleigh broken down? Had any of his reindeer run away? Had he lost his own, particular, pet, private map?—for a body must have a wonderful map to guide him all about among the chimneys of the whole world.

But no,—it was none of these things. Could n't he find toys enough to go round? Bless your dear little anxious heart, don't you be afraid of that! He had thousands of bushels of toys left after planning all the stockings of the children whose names were down in his books! Oh! no. Santa Claus had toys enough. That was n't the trouble!

I should n't have said, "after planning *all* the stockings." One stocking there was for which Santa Claus had not yet planned a single thing; and that was why poor dear old Santa



"SANTA CLAUS SAT THERE THINKING—THINKING."

Claus was in such a state of worry and anxiety. This stocking belonged to a little boy whose good parents had long before Christmas sent in his name to Santa Claus. But although there had been plenty of time, and Santa Claus had put plenty of thought upon the matter, he had not yet been able to decide upon even ONE thing for that little boy's stocking. So there he sat by the fire, thinking and thinking and thinking.

Perhaps it seems strange to you that Santa should be puzzled about such a thing as that,

when filling stockings is his regular profession,—(a highly honorable one, too, and long may Santa live to grace it!),—but the little boy to whom that stocking belonged was a very strange and unusual child. If anything was given to him he would either break it to pieces very soon or do some naughty mischief with it. Worst of all, he would even hurt his nurse or his little brothers and sisters with his beautiful toys, if he happened to feel like doing so.

Yet kind old Santa could not bear to leave even this stocking empty. So he had been puzzling his brains to find something with which the little boy could not hurt people, and something he could not break; and although he had been thinking over all his lists of toys and presents, nothing had he found yet!

"Chirp! Chirp!" sounded a sharp little voice. "Chirp! chirp! You may as well give it up. He does n't deserve anything, the little scamp!"

"Oh! Is that you, Cricket?" said Santa. "Come up here," and as he held out his fat forefinger a tiny black cricket reached it with a sudden jump.

"You may as well give it up!" creaked the cricket in a shrill tone. "You can't think of anything, / know."

"It begins to seem as if I could n't," said Santa Claus dolefully. "But I am so sorry for the boy! I can't bear to think of that stocking, and of the poor little rascal's disappointment on Christmas morning. What do you think of those nice little donkeys, saddled and bridled, and with cunning little baskets slung at each side? Little—(ahem! you know who I mean, and it is best not to mention names)—he would be delighted with one of them, and they are really quite strong."

"Chirp!" snapped out the cricket, scarcely waiting for Santa to finish; "quite strong, indeed! But you know perfectly well that it does n't matter much how strong a thing is, any more than how nice it is. That boy breaks everything! You know yourself he had ten presents on his birthday, about a month ago, and where are they now? All broken but the umbrella his mamma gave him, and that has been put away."

"I know, I know," said Santa. "No! I can't give him the donkey!—nor any other of

those fine little animals that we have this year. Nor a drum; nor a cart; nor a wheelbarrow; nor a ship; nor a fire-engine; nor a top; nor a music-box; nor a clock! Oh! *how* I *did* want to give him one of those fascinating clocks!" and Santa Claus looked very wistfully at the cricket, and then sighed heavily. "But I know I could n't. I can't bear to see the nice presents and interesting toys broken to pieces. But I've thought of *one* thing, Cricket; and I don't believe he *could* break it. And yet he would like it, I am sure." Santa looked a little more cheerfully at the cricket, and continued: "I thought of a nice little hammer and box of nails, and some blocks of wood for him to hammer the nails into! That's the present for him. Hey, now! what do you think of that?"

"What do I think?" said the cricket. "I think, Santa Claus, that you have forgotten how the little boy beat his brother with his drumsticks; how he snipped his sister's fingers with the scissors; how he threw his harmonica at the nurse; how he—"

"Dear, dear, dear!" groaned Santa, "so he did; so he did!"

"And if you keep giving him things when he uses them so wrongly," continued the cricket, "how will he ever learn better? To be sure, his mamma and papa and all his kind friends are trying to teach him, but it is necessary that everybody should help to train such a boy as—"

"I know," interrupted Santa, "I know. You're a wise little counselor, and not as hard-hearted as you seem. And if you think it will cure the poor little fellow, I suppose we must give him the sawdust this year."

"Yes," said the cricket solemnly, "sawdust it must be."

Christmas morning came. The little boy, whose name Santa Claus did not wish mentioned, saw all the other children pull out one treasure after another from their long, well-stuffed stockings, while in his own, which he had hung up with so much hope the night before, there was nothing but sawdust!

If I should use all the sad words in the English language I never could tell you how sad



that little boy was as he poured the sawdust out of his stocking, and found that Santa Claus had really sent him nothing else.

Poor little chap!

It was almost a year later, just before Christmas, when Santa Claus again sat by his fire—thinking.

But this time he was in no trouble; no, indeed, not he! He was rounder and rosier and jollier than ever before; and how he was smiling and chuckling to himself! His eyes twinkled so, and were so very bright, that you could almost have lit a candle at them. He and the cricket had been planning all sorts of ecstatic surprises for the stocking of the boy to whom they had given sawdust the year before; for, if you can believe it, the little boy had been trying all the year to be careful and gentle, and he was really quite changed!

"Sawdust is a grand thing," chirped the cricket, leaping about in delight.

"Yes, but I am glad we do not need to use it this year," replied Santa. "Let me see the list again. Don't you suppose we could cram in one or two more things? Have you put down the—"

This is the end of the story; or, at least, all that could be told before Christmas; for if I should write more and a certain little boy should read it, he would know just what would be in his stocking—and that would never do in the world!

